

# Lincoln County Schools



## Volunteer Handbook

**Requirements:** All volunteers must complete a state criminal background check every four (4) years. Volunteers are expected to update the school immediately if they are subsequently convicted of any crime, misdemeanor or otherwise. Volunteers must also complete the Handbook Questionnaire, Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement, and Volunteer Release Form.

Volunteers in a school or a program serve at the sole discretion of the building principal, program manager, or teacher. Permission to volunteer may be revoked at any time by the building principal or program manager.

**Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Rules:** The District is committed to providing students with a positive and safe learning environment, and we follow federal and state guidelines to ensure that we neither promote nor tolerate discriminatory or harassing behaviors in our schools. Volunteers are expected to exhibit behavior that is respectful and assumes equality toward members of the same and opposite sex, and all ethnic/racial and religious groups. Volunteers shall not make any comments that can be construed as racist, sexist, or bigoted. Volunteers shall respect cultural differences and attempt to broaden their knowledge and understanding of human relations. Volunteers shall avoid promoting any commercial products, religious doctrines, or beliefs, as well as any political candidates (this includes political buttons) or parties.

Harassment consists of unwanted or uninvited sexual comments, advances, cartoons, innuendoes, racial and gender slurs or jokes, intimidation, etc. It can occur between an adult and a child, between two adults, or between two children. If a volunteer becomes aware of a behavior that might constitute harassment, report it immediately to a teacher or the building administrator so that it can be investigated and addressed.

**Emergency Response:** Because volunteers may be in the building during a crisis or fire drill, it's important that, just like our students and staff, they know how to evacuate the building or respond to an emergency. Be familiar with the emergency procedures and exits, and evacuation routes for the building. In every building, there are staff members trained in first aid and emergency assistance. Volunteers are to call on these individuals to administer first aid unless the situation is critical. The only persons authorized to administer medications are trained school nurses and office staff.

**Professionalism:** Although the job is voluntary, the commitment is professional. Besides maintaining an attitude of mutual respect and confidence, become familiar with school and classroom policies and practices. Working with the teaching staff requires flexibility and a willingness to follow directions. Volunteers are expected to show decorum in their actions, speech, and dress. Treat school staff and students with respect and courtesy and expect the same in return. Please be on time! Volunteers' timeliness affects a teacher's ability to execute their daily plan.

**Confidentiality:** All students have the right to expect that information about them will be kept confidential by all volunteers. Additionally, the U.S. congress has addressed the privacy-related concerns of educators, parents, and students by enacting the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”).

Volunteers must protect the teachers’ and students’ right to privacy. Once a volunteer begins to work in a school setting, s/he becomes privy to knowledge about children’s behavior patterns, academic ability, emotional maturity, relationships with others, etc. In some cases, information of this nature is imparted so that the volunteer can work more effectively with the child. In other cases, it is simply acquired during frequent contact in the school. In addition, volunteers are in a position to learn more about staff members than would normally be learned from their public image.

Never share knowledge and/or opinions about the professional competency of individual teachers and staff in the community or with anyone who has no legitimate need to know. Never make comments harmful to the reputation of any pupil, professional or other volunteer. If parents and friends ask about your work, tell them you enjoy working with the children and discuss the activities you do rather than specific information about the child, the teacher, or the school. If problems develop, the line of communication regarding a situation in the school is always first with the staff member concerned and then, if necessary, with the principal.

To make sure that students, staff, and families feel comfortable, we all need to respect each other’s privacy. Volunteers must be especially careful to honor confidentiality. Breaching confidentiality can be hurtful to children, their families, and the staff. It can also harm the good reputation our volunteer parents have earned over the years. To help, here are some sample issues that can arise.

- “Wasn’t it cute when John . . .” No matter how innocent, cute, funny or charming a classroom event may be, it is not okay to repeat stories about students. What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom.
- When parents ask you questions . . . Many parents are tempted to ask you about how their children behave at school. This is especially likely if you are friends outside school. It is not okay to put volunteers in this awkward position. If parents do have concerns, encourage them to talk to the class teacher.
- When you see or overhear something . . . As a volunteer, you might see or hear things from staff or students which they would not want to have repeated outside the school. What happens in the classroom (or the hall, or the gym) stays at school. If you have concerns about something you see or hear, please talk to the class teacher or Principal if appropriate.
- When students tell you about their family, pet, vacation, etc. . . . As students become comfortable working with you, they might decide to share something personal. You need to keep this information private, even if you know the child and their family outside of school.
- When you have a concern . . . If a student tells you something that causes you concern, tell the classroom teacher. If you observe something that troubles you, tell the classroom teacher. The teacher is in the best position to deal with the issue appropriately

**Dependability:** Please come to and be timely for all scheduled volunteer opportunities. The teachers and staff have planned activities for you and the students. If something comes up, please be considerate of those depending on you, and notify the appropriate school office as early as possible.

**Discipline:** Allow the teachers to discipline children. If there are incidents of misbehavior, it is the teacher's job to deal with them. As a volunteer, it is helpful to be specific about rules and expectations with students. Consistently and calmly work with students taking a neutral stance, restating rules and expectations, and offering reasonable choices.

**Equality:** Accept students in terms of their backgrounds, values, and aspirations. These may be different from yours. Remain consistent by applying the same rules each time to every student.

**Do Not:**

- Supervise a class without a teacher present
- Discipline students
- Talk about a student.
- Damage a student's self-esteem by criticizing, using harsh words, or labeling with negative words such as "You lied," "You cheated," or "You should know that answer."
- Judge a student. Each student is different and needs every chance to succeed.
- Pass on confidential information about a student or their family.
- Make comments regarding the relevancy of activities or procedures.
- Make comments regarding the appropriateness of teaching materials.
- Contact parents regarding the performance of students.
- Attempt to visit with the teacher or other volunteers during the school day. This is very disruptive to the students and the educational process.

**Tips and Hints**

- Demonstrate patience. Speak quietly, be calm and attentive, and use positive statements when working with students.
- Be a good listener rather than a good talker.
- Try to be on the same level as the student so that you can look directly into his/her eyes. This way the student knows you are giving your undivided attention.
- When speaking to students, use a tone of voice that will encourage and make them feel accepted.
- State directions in a positive form. "Use the blocks for building" rather than "Don't throw the blocks."
- Avoid comparing students and their work. We are all individuals with unique talents. Children need every opportunity to feel successful and proud of their accomplishments.
- Don't help too much. Students learn by doing, not through passive observation. Students learn by asking questions and by searching for answers to their questions. Ask students questions that may lead to the correct answer instead of telling them the answer directly.
- Avoid physical contact with students.
- SMILE. A smile to a child means warmth and acceptance.